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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000031

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: 10TH ROUND OF ERGENEKON ARRESTS ROCK  
POLITICAL SCENE

REF: A. 08 ANKARA 2041

[1](#)B. 08 ANKARA 1701

[1](#)C. 08 ANKARA 1392

[1](#)D. 08 ISTANBUL 611

Classified By:  
DCM Doug Silliman, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: A new wave of arrests on January 7 related to the Ergenekon investigation (ref a) included two retired four star generals and the former chair of the Higher Education Council (YOK). A former mayor of Istanbul, Bedrettin Dalan, who is in the U.S. currently, is also being sought. Nine active duty officers, including four colonels, were also taken into custody with the permission of the Turkish General Staff (TGS). The house of the honorary chairman of the Court of Appeals was also searched by the police. Eleven people were detained in Sivas; the Sivas governor alleged that the arrests prevented a "major assassination plot." Following the news of the arrests, Turkey's top brass reportedly met for six hours but did not issue a statement. The Court of Appeals is meeting January 8 to discuss the detentions. Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal denounced the arrests as "revenge operations," accusing the ruling AKP of pursuing a "Peronist hegemony." A senior retired general told us he did not anticipate any significant response from the military unless accusations are made against the current military leadership -- a step he does not expect. Influential columnist Murat Yetkin called for the prosecutor to issue indictments against those arrested so that the public can better understand the reasons for the arrest. Absent indictments, the Ergenekon investigation will increasingly be perceived as a government attempt to silence its critics. End Summary and Comment.

NEW ARRESTS ROCK TURKEY  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) News of the tenth round of arrests on January 7 linked to the investigations against Ergenekon, a shadowy organization whose alleged goal is to overthrow the government (ref a), dominated Turkish media, overtaking the blanket coverage of Israeli operations in Gaza. While there are conflicting reports about the details and numbers of those arrested, the following information has been reported consistently in the media:

-- Turkish National Police arrested between 37 and 40 people in at least 7 cities (including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Sivas) in connection with the Ergenekon investigation.

-- Among those arrested were:

- a. General (ret) Tuncer Kilinc, Former Secretary General of the National Security Council (62 years-old)
- b. General (ret) Kemal Yavuz, Former Commander of the Second Army (75 years-old)
- c. Lieutenant General (ret) Erdal Senel, Former Legal Counselor to the Turkish General Staff
- d. Professor Kemal Guruz, former head of the Higher Education Council (YOK)

-- Former Istanbul mayor Bedrettin Dalan is also being sought by the police in connection to the investigation. His house was searched and his son was detained in the arrest operation. Dalan, who is currently in the U.S., has stated his intention to return to Turkey. (Comment: Dalan is well-regarded even by political opponents for his successful efforts to rehabilitate the then-highly polluted Golden Horn while mayor. He is the president of Yeditepe University, a private school, and a close Consulate General Istanbul contact. End Comment).

-- Nine active duty officers, including four colonels, two majors, one captain, and two first lieutenants were detained in seven separate locations (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Sakarya, Sirnak, Kastamonu and Kocaeli) with the permission of the Turkish General Staff.

-- Police found a cache of weapons (22 hand grenades, five pistols, an AK-47 machine gun and over one hundred rounds of ammunition) in a vacation house near Adapazar belonging to

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Lieutenant Mustafa Donmez, an active duty officer.

-- The houses of former chief prosecutor (and current honorary chairman) of the Court of Appeals Sabih Kanadoglu were searched, but Kanadoglu was not detained.

-- Sivas Governor Veyvel Dalmaz alleged publicly that the arrests in Sivas prevented "major assassination plots" including one targeting an Armenian religious community leader in Sivas.

-- This latest round of arrests raises the number of those under detention to about 140. Those arrested can be generally grouped into eight categories: retired or active duty military, academics, politicians, journalists, retired police officers, attorneys, businessmen and people affiliated with an assortment of ultra-nationalist associations.

#### OPPOSITION, KEMALISTS DENOUNCES ARRESTS

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13. (SBU) Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal condemned the arrests, calling them "revenge operations." Comparing the arrests to action taken by Argentinean dictator Juan Peron to silence his opposition, Baykal accused the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of setting up a "Peronist hegemony."

14. (SBU) Echoing Baykal's remarks, Istanbul Bar Association President Muammer Aydin claimed that the people arrested have been targeted for comments they made when they were in office and that the operations were conducted with "sentiments of vengeance." He added that it was unacceptable to detain a person and then to look for evidence.

#### TOP BRASS GATHERS, BUT REMAINS SILENT

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15. (SBU) The media reports TGS Chief Ilker Basbug chaired a six-hour meeting of senior military commanders on January 7, subsequent to the arrests. The TGS has not issued a statement and canceled the regular weekly press briefing originally scheduled for January 9. In a surprise move,

Basbug postponed a regular weekly meeting with President Gul by an hour to meet with PM Erdogan (Basbug also canceled a January 8 appointment previously scheduled with the Ambassador). Media reports that the wives of active duty senior commanders paid a visit to the family of General Kilinc following news of his arrest.

¶6. (C) Retired Major General Riza Kucukoglu, who heads the Association of Retired Military Officers, told us he did not expect any reaction from the military unless there are direct allegations against the current TGS leadership, which he does not anticipate. Kucukoglu, a long-time friend of CHOD Basbug, believes that Basbug would not take a confrontational, public approach in response to the latest arrests.

¶7. (C) Kucukoglu says the military's position on Ergenekon has been consistent since the beginning: It opposes any criminal elements within the military and will support the judiciary's investigations into Ergenekon. The TGS is also against any "alternate command structures" within the chain of command, and will support punishing those proven guilty. At the same time, the military supports the application of the rule of law and believes those detained, including retired senior military officials, should know why they are under arrest. While acknowledging that many of the senior officers are known for their "patriotic" views and their criticism of the AKP, Kucukoglu emphasized that this alone does not constitute a crime. He noted that those detained in the July arrests (ref b), including Generals Tolon and Eruygur, still have not been indicted and "no one knows what crimes they have committed."

¶8. (C) AKP supporters predictably have applauded the arrests as the next step to weed out Turkey's "Deep State," while AKP opponents decried the arrests as a move to silence those who oppose the ruling party. However, there is growing concern, as noted by influential columnist Murat Yetkin, that the

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Ergenekon case is being used as a weapon to intimidate critics of the government. To maintain the credibility of the investigation and counter these concerns, Yetkin called on the prosecution to issue indictments for those arrested since July 2008.

COMMENT

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¶9. (C) TGS reaction to this round of arrests is different - a long meeting of the senior brass without a statement and a surprise meeting between CHOD Basbug and PM Erdogan - and may signal that these arrests are beginning to hit close to home.

The arrest of vocal retired generals representing the more nationalistic, hard-line view within the military community will have irritated those holding similar views, including senior active duty officers. Contacts who know Basbug warn us not to read too much into TGS's silence; unlike his predecessor, Basbug prefers not to air differences with the government in the media and that he and Erdogan have developed a functional, business-like relationship. We have also heard that Basbug is personally and deeply against military intervention in politics, given his experience as a military cadet during the 1960 coup (ref c). This latest round of arrests will test the Erdogan-Basbug relationship and only time will tell how the ongoing Ergenekon saga will impact their ability to work together.

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Jeffrey